

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1 – 33 (canceled)

34. **(currently amended)** An intermediate product used in the manufacture of an optical fiber and protected against break-inducing particulates, the intermediate product comprising:

a silica-containing article which is or can be used to form an optical fiber preform from which an optical fiber can be drawn and which has not yet been drawn into an optical fiber; and

a protective layer, wherein the protective layer includes an organic material which comprises at least one of hydrocarbon silane, fluorocarbon silane, epoxy functional silanes, acrylate functional silane, amine functional silane, thiol functional silane, phenyl functional silane, an alkyl and aryl ammonium compound, ~~acrylate polymer~~, polyvinyl alcohol, and a wax.

35. **(original)** The intermediate product of claim 34, wherein the protective layer can be removed before subsequent processing of the intermediate product.

36. **(original)** The intermediate product of claim 34, wherein the protective layer can be ablated during subsequent processing of the intermediate product.

37. **(original)** The intermediate product of claim 36, wherein the protective layer leaves essentially no detrimental inorganic residue after ablating.

38. **(original)** The intermediate product of claim 34, wherein the protective layer inhibits bonding of particulates to the silica-containing article.

39. **(original)** The intermediate product of claim 38, wherein the protective layer inhibits bonding by occupying active sites on the silica-containing article such that particulates cannot bond to those active sites.

40. **(original)** The intermediate product of claim 39, wherein the active sites include groups that will form a SiMO_x compound, where M is a metal.

41. **(original)** The intermediate product of claim 38, wherein the protective layer includes carbon.

42. **(cancel)**

43. **(currently amended)** The intermediate product of claim ~~42~~ 34, wherein the protective layer includes at least one of a water soluble polymer, a thermoplastic polymer, a latex based polymer, a thermoset polymer, and a UV curable polymer.

44. **(currently amended)** The intermediate product of claim ~~34~~ 42, wherein the organic material forms a self-assembled monolayer on the silica-containing article.

45. **(cancel)**

46. **(original)** The intermediate product of claim 34, wherein the silica-containing article includes a fiber preform from which an optical fiber is drawn.

47. **(withdrawn)** The intermediate product of claim 34, wherein the silica-containing article includes one of a core cane and a core blank used in an outside vapor deposition process.

48. **(withdrawn)** The intermediate product of claim 34, wherein the silica-containing article includes a glass tube used in an inside vapor deposition process.

49. **(original)** The intermediate product of claim 34, wherein the protective layer is applied to a consolidated glass surface.

50. **(previously presented)** A method of protecting a silica-containing article used in the manufacture of an optical fiber, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a silica-containing article used in the manufacture of an optical fiber;
and

applying a protective layer consisting essentially of an alkyl ammonium compound, an aryl ammonium compound, or a wax to a consolidated glass surface of the silica-containing article.

51. **(currently amended)** An intermediate product used in the manufacture of an optical fiber and protected against break-inducing particulates, the intermediate product comprising:

a silica-containing article which is or can be used to form an optical fiber,
wherein said article has not yet been drawn into an optical fiber

preform from which a fiber can be drawn; and
a protective layer formed on said silica-containing article, wherein the protective layer is an organic material which forms a self-assembled monolayer on the silica-containing article.

52. **(previously presented)** The intermediate product of claim 51, wherein the silica-containing article is an optical fiber preform from which an optical fiber can be drawn.

53. **(new)** An intermediate product used in the manufacture of an optical fiber and protected against break-inducing particulates, the intermediate product comprising:

a silica-containing article which is or can be used to form an optical fiber preform from which an optical fiber can be drawn; and

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a protective layer, wherein the protective layer includes an organic material which comprises at least one of a water soluble acrylate polymer or polyvinyl alcohol.